

## Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05  
H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01  
SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 ACDA-07 AID-05 ARA-10 /101 W  
-----123552 070650Z /14

R 061427Z SEP 77  
FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5511  
INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO  
AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI  
AMEMBASSY JIDDA  
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM  
AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW  
AMEMBASSY NAIROBI  
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GERMANY

C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 5323

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: MOPS PINS ET  
SUBJECT: SITUATION IN ERITREA

SUMMARY: DESPITE MANPOWER REINFORCEMENTS OF ETHIOPIAN GARRISONS IN ERITREA IN JULY AND AUGUST, ETHIOPIAN MILITARY POSITION HAS CONTINUED TO DECLINE. DURING PAST TWO MONTHS, ETHIOPIAN EFFORTS TO CROSS TEKAZZE RIVER INTO ERITREA FROM HUMERA HAVE BEEN ABANDONED; ERITREAN LIBERATION FRONT (ELF) FORCES HAVE CLAIMED CAPTURE OF AGORDAT IN WEST; MANDEFERA AND ADI QUALE IN SOUTH-CENTRAL HAVE REPORTEDLY FALLEN; AND ETHIOPIAN ATTEMPTS TO RECAPTURE KEY TOWNS OF SAGANETTI AND DECAMERE HAVE SO FAR BEEN UNSUCCESSFUL. HOWEVER, GUERRILLA SUCCESSES HAVE NOT RESULTED IN UNIFICATION OF THREE GROUPS ACTIVELY FIGHTING. BARRING LATTER DEVELOPMENT, PROSPECTS ARE FOR CONTINUED PROTRACTED CONFLICT IN PROVINCE.  
END SUMMARY.

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1. RELIABLE SOURCES BELIEVE 20-30,000 OF NEWLY TRAINED PEOPLE'S MILITIA HAVE BEEN SENT TO ERITREA IN PAST TWO MONTHS, MAINLY TO ASMARA, ASSAB AND MASSAWA. THEY HAVE ARRIVED BY ROAD TO ASSAB, THENCE BY SHIP TO MASSAWA AND BY ROAD AND AIR TO ASMARA. GESIT FORCE, WHICH RECAPTURED HUMERA IN JUNE, FAILED TO CROSS TEKAZZO RIVER WITH ANY

SUCCESS TO RETAKE OM HAGGER, AFTER ELF FORCES RETREAT-  
ING FROM HUMERA DESTROYED BRIDGE AND HELD STRATEGIC  
POSITIONS ON ERITREAN SIDE. HEAVY EQUIPMENT, INCLUDING  
SELF-PROPELLED US 155MM. GUNDS AND APC'S, PREVIOUSLY  
TRANSFERRED TO GONDAR REGION WITH GESIT FORCE, BEGAN  
ARRIVING IN ADDIS ABABA PAST WEEK AND IS APPARENTLY  
BEING REDEPLOYED TO EASTERN FRONT. RELIABLE SOURCE  
STATED GESIT TROOPS BEGAN RETURNING FROM HUMERA AT  
LEAST 10 DAYS AGO. IT REASONABLE TO ASSUME ETHIOPIANS  
HAVE DEFERRED FURTHER ATTEMPTS TO CROSS RIVER AND RETAKE  
TESSENEI ON SUDAN BORDER.

2. GUERRILLA OPERATIONS HAVE NOT SUFFERED ANY MAJOR  
SETBACKS SINCE BEGINNING OF YEAR. SALEH SABBE GROUP  
HAS CLAIMED TO HAVE CAPTURED AGORDAT (ALTHOUGH CAPTURE  
NOT CERTAIN YET), WHEREAS ELF HAS CLAIMED CAPTURE OF  
ADI QUALE AND MANDEFERA DURING PAST MONTH. THIS WOULD  
LEAVE ONLY BARENTU STILL UNDER FULL ETHIOPIAN CONTROL  
IN WEST OF PROVINCE. RECENT ELF EFFORTS SEEN BY MANY  
OBSERVERS AS ATTEMPT TO COUNTERBALANCE ERITREAN POPULAR  
LIBERATION FRONT (EPLF) SUCCESSES IN TESSENEI, KEREN,  
EL ABERED, NACFA, AFA BET, SAGANETTI AND DECAMERE,  
AND EPLF'S CONCOMITANT RISE IN STATURE, INTERNALLY AND  
EXTERNALLY.

3. TO FORESTALL FURTHER GUERRILLA SUCCESSES AND POSSI-  
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BLE SIEGE OF ASMARA, IT APPEARS ETHIOPIAN REGULAR  
TROOPS AND MILITIA ATTEMPTED TO MOVE SOUTH FROM ASMARA  
TO RECAPTURE DECAMERE THEREE WEEKS AGO. HOWEVER, RELIA-  
BLE SOURCES REPORTED EPLF FORCES WERE ABLE TO BLOCK  
ROAD SUCCESSFULLY SOME 12 KMS. SOUTH OF ASMARA, AND  
TO INFLICT HEAVY CASUALTIES. MASSAWA-ASMARA ROAD HAS  
BEEN INTERDICTED NUMBER OF TIMES, BUT SUPPLIES STILL  
APPARENTLY ARRIVING BY ARMED CONVOY. IT WOULD APPEAR  
ROAD BEING ALLOWED TO REMAIN OPEN BY GUERRILLAS,  
RATHER THAN AS RESULT OF ANY EPMG ACTION, AND THAT TEM-  
PORARY INTERDICTIONS ARE MORE FOR HARASSMENT PURPOSES  
THAN OPERATION. ASSAB PORT AND ROAD HAVE NOT BEEN  
ATTACKED YET. THIS APPEARS BOTH RESULT OF TIGHT ETHIO-  
PIAN DEFENSIVE PRECAUTIONS AND LOGISTICAL DIFFICULTIES.

4. GUERRILLAS GENERALLY CONCEDED TO CONTROL 90 PER CENT OF  
ERITREAN COUNTRYSIDE. HOWEVER, THERE STILL NO REASON-  
ABLE PROSPECT THREE GROUPS CAN UNIFY INTO SINGLE FRONT  
WHICH COULD GOVERN ERITREA. PROSPECTS MUCH MORE LIKELY  
THAT BITTER ANGOA-LIKE CIVIL STRUGGLE BETWEEN ELF AND  
EPLF WOULD ENSUE IF COMMON ETHIOPIAN ENEMY WERE WITH-  
DRAWN. RECENT VISITS BY EPLF LEADERS TO NEIGHBORING

ARAB GOVERNMENTS SUGGEST EPLF MAY BE MODERATING ITS PREVIOUSLY STAUNCH MARXIST-LENINIST POSITION TO BROADEN ITS SUPPORT INTERNALLY AND EXTERNALLY AND POSSIBLY AS REACTION TO SOVIET, EAST EUROPEAN, AND CUBAN SUPPORT FOR MENGISTU REGIME. ON OTHER HAND, RUMORS CONTINUE TO CIRCULATE IN ADDIS THAT EPMG IS IN CONTACT SOMEWHERE WITH EPLF FOR PURPOSES OF WORKING OUT SOME KIND OF SATISFACTORY ARRANGEMENT WITH THEM.

5. COMMENT: ETHIOPIAN MILITARY POSITION IN ERITREA HAS DETERIORATED GREATLY SINCE BEGINNING OF YEAR, AND CENTRAL GOVERNMENT LESS ABLE TO COPE WITH PROBLEM THAN IN PAST, GIVEN MORE URGENT PRIORITIES IN OGADEN. HOWEVER, GUERRILLAS HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO EXPLOIT FAVOR-  
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ABLE SITUATION TO ATTAIN INTERNAL POLITICAL UNITY. THIS OBSTACLE STILL MAJOR HURDLE FOR ELF, EPLF, AND OS-MAN SALEH SABBE GROUP TO OVERCOME IF THEY HOPE TO AVOID CIVIL WAR OR REESTABLISHMENT IN LONG RUN OF GREATER ETHIOPIAN CONTROL OVER ERITREA. RIVALRY AMONG GROUPS AUGURS AGAINST UNITY. IT ALSO SUGGESTS THAT CONCERTED EFFORT AGAINST ASMARA MAY EVEN BE DELAYED OR SERIOUSLY HAMPERED, SINCE HE WHO TAKES ASMARA WILL BE IN DRIVER'S SEAT IN WORKING OUT FUTURE ERITREAN POLITICAL SETUP. THUS, PROSPECT FOR AN INDEPENDENT ERITREA, FREE OF EXTERNAL CONTROL AND AT PEACE, STILL FAR FROM IMMINENT.  
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## Message Attributes

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